Network on Early Childhood Education and Care

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION - DEFINITIONS AND REPORTING

Background document for the 10th meeting of the INES Working Party

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Background

A new indicator on Early Childhood Education (ECE) was published in the 2012 edition of Education at a Glance (EAG). This indicator provided a new and highly visible platform for examining the international performance of ECE systems. Despite the success of this new indicator, the ECE working group has identified some issues for further development. This paper is intended to help guide the discussion around the future directions for the ECE indicator.

It is expected that due to the reduced timeframes for publishing EAG 2013, these issues are best considered in relation to EAG 2014, although there may be scope to initiate some work in the lead up to EAG 2013.

INES Working Party members are requested to:

- **DISCUSS** the boundary between childcare and education and **PROPOSE** further action for improving the UOE technical manual and the interpretability of the ECE indicator in EAG;

- **IDENTIFY** other areas of improvement or development for the ECE indicator, including:
  - **DISCUSS** the implications of excluding ISCED 0 from total expenditure in EAG; and
  - **DISCUSS** whether child care data should be reported in EAG.

Defining the boundary between childcare and education

During the development of the new ECE indicator, the issue of defining the boundary between childcare and education was discussed at length. It was noted that the issue could not be quickly resolved and it was agreed that further consideration was required in the context of the implementation strategy for ISCED-2011, in particular, during the development of the UOE technical manual.

Learning and development versus education

One of the issues raised revolves around the idea that children develop and learn constantly through a large variety of activities. From this perspective, nearly all program content develops the child and therefore could be considered educational.

Whilst this idea has conceptual merit, it is unlikely to meet the UOE technical manual requirements nor does it ensure comparability of data (as it may be interpreted differently among countries).

With regard to data comparability, the question of whether the current technical manual assists countries in determining the boundary between childcare and education remains. At the practical level, there is also a question of whether it enables accurate data reporting.
There may be merit in obtaining qualitative information from countries to illustrate how the distinction between childcare and education is made. This information would be useful in guiding refinements in the UOE technical manual and could potentially be included in the EAG, for example as a text box or in an annex, with the aim of improving the interpretability of the ECE indicator.

It is also worth considering this issue separately for enrolments, personnel and expenditure as the method of identifying the boundary between childcare and education may differ for each.

Furthermore, in the modern context the boundary between childcare and education is becoming increasingly blurred. It could therefore be useful to consider the inclusion of both childcare and education data in EAG reporting, and distinguish between the two only when the data is comparable (see ‘Inclusion of childcare data in EAG’ below, for further information on this proposal might work).

For information: the ISCED-97 UOE technical manual and ISCED-2011 paper in relation to ECE can be found at Attachment A.

Exclusion of ECE from total expenditure reporting in EAG

EAG 2012 noted that several countries (Austria, Hungary, Israel, New Zealand, Slovenia and the United States) are not able to remove child care expenditure from ECE reporting and that this may overstate their true levels of expenditure on ECE and affect comparative analysis.

One of the options discussed by the ECE working group, in light of the above information, was to exclude ISCED 0 expenditure from "total" education (ISCED 0-6) expenditure reported in EAG. Total expenditure would then range from ISCED 1 to ISCED 6.

Under this proposal, ISCED 0 expenditure would be solely reported in the ECE indicator and some of the existing tables in EAG would need to be modified to exclude ISCED 0 expenditure.

Inclusion of childcare data in EAG

As noted above, there remains some concern regarding how and where to draw the boundary between childcare and education at the pre-primary level and how this data is best reported in EAG. During the development of the new ECE indicator some countries expressed concern that separating child care from education was a somewhat outdated idea conceptually and very difficult (and sometimes impossible) in practice.

One possible solution to this issue is to report on both childcare and education in EAG. Countries that are then able to meaningfully separate data between childcare and education could continue to do so and those that cannot could just supply total data. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Education (1)</th>
<th>Childcare (2)</th>
<th>Total (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country A</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country B</td>
<td>x:3</td>
<td>x:3</td>
<td>x:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country C</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country D</td>
<td>x:3</td>
<td>x:3</td>
<td>x:3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: x:3 indicates this data is included in column 3 (total)
In this context, childcare only relates to 'integrated' ISCED 0 programs and it would need to be restricted to the same age range as for ISCED 0 (i.e. 3 to 6 years).

This idea also provides alignment with proposals by the OECD's Network on Early Childhood Education and Care to use INES and EAG to assist with the effective dissemination of policy relevant data (paper ref. EDU/EDPC/ECEC(2012)3). Furthermore, this proposal would provide linkages to child care data already collected through the OECD's Social Expenditure and Family databases and would not place additional reporting burden on member countries. There would, however, need to be a collaborative work program established between INES and the OECD's Network on Early Childhood Education and Care to achieve this outcome.
ISCED-97

EXTRACT FROM THE UNESCO/OECD/EUROSTAT TECHNICAL MANUAL ON ISCED 0

2.2. Coverage of early childhood education programmes

Tables ENRL-1, ENRL-1a, ENRL-7 request data on pupils enrolled in early childhood education programmes.

Pre-primary education (ISCED 0) is defined as the initial stage of organised instruction, designed primarily to introduce very young children to a school-type environment, that is, to provide a bridge between home and a school-based atmosphere.

The distinction between programmes that would fall into ISCED 0 and programmes that would be outside of the scope of ISCED-97 rests primarily on the educational properties of the programme. As the educational properties are difficult to assess directly, several proxy measures should be used to determine whether or not a programme should be classified at this level (for more details, please refer to Chapter 2 devoted to the implementation of the ISCED-97 classification).

As a general rule, programmes designed for children below 3 years of age should be excluded from the UOE reporting on pre-primary education. If occasionally children below the age of 3 are accepted in programmes designed for children 3 years old or older, also the younger children could be included. If the programme is designed for children above as well as below the age of 3, only children aged 3 and above should be reported in the UOE. Data on personnel and on finance have in such cases to be adjusted according to the same coverage.

When children receive both education and day care in the same programmes, countries should make efforts to exclude the “day care component” from the UOE reporting of personnel and finance.

When no exact data on students in pre-primary programmes of mixed institutions are available, the number of students should be estimated according to the typical age group for pre-primary education.

Individual students enrolled in both an educational programme and a non-educational programme should be reported fully in the educational programme."

Source: 2012 UOE Manual (Volume 1), page 6
9. ISCED 0 - PRE-PRIMARY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

9.1 Definitions and classification criteria

Pre-primary education (ISCED 0) is defined as the initial stage of organised instruction, designed primarily to introduce very young children to a school-type environment, that is, to provide a bridge between the home and a school-based atmosphere.

**Boundary between education and child care.** Some countries internally define pre-primary or early childhood education more broadly than others. Thus, the comparability of international statistics on pre-primary education depends on each country’s willingness to report data for this level according to a standard international definition, even if that definition diverges from the one that the country uses in compiling its own national statistics. The distinction between programmes that would fall into ISCED 0 and programmes that would be outside of the scope of ISCED-97 rests primarily on the educational properties of the programme. As the educational properties are difficult to assess directly, several proxy measures should be used to determine whether or not a programme should be classified at this level. ISCED 0 programmes:

**INCLUDE** early childhood programmes that:

- Are centre or school-based,
- Are designed to meet the educational and developmental needs of children,
- Typically cater for children at least 3 years of age,
- And have staff that are adequately trained (i.e. qualified) to provide an educational programme for the children,

**EXCLUDE** early childhood programmes that fail to meet these criteria.

**Centre-based.** For a programme to be considered as pre-primary education, it must be school-based or centre-based. These terms are used to distinguish activities in organised educational settings from services provided in households or family settings, which would generally not be included at this level. These centres may come under the jurisdiction of a public or private school or other education service provider.

**Age range.** Programmes at this level are typically designed for children at least 3 years old and not older than 6. Most OECD countries consider the typical starting age of pre-primary education to be three years or older and do not include children younger than three in their own national statistics on pre-primary education. In some cases, however, programmes that are considered “educational” by the country concerned serve children as young as two or two-and-a-half. An educational programme cannot be considered as belonging to level 0 if it is primarily designed to serve children aged two years or less.

The upper age limit depends in each case on the typical age for entry into primary education, typically age 6 or 7.
Staff qualifications and educational content in the curriculum. As it is very difficult to specify precisely where child-care ends and education begins for children at very young ages, it is necessary to rely on proxy criteria. The requirement of pedagogical qualifications for the teaching staff can be a good proxy criterion to distinguish an educational programme from a non-educational programme. It serves to distinguish pre-primary education from child-care for which para-medical or no qualifications are required. In countries where the government does not closely regulate pre-primary education (e.g. there are no qualification requirements for staff), this criteria cannot be, however, the sole factor determining whether or not a programme has sufficient educational content to be classified at ISCED 0.

Formal implementation of a curriculum with educational elements is also a useful criterion to distinguish a programme that meets the educational content requirements of ISCED 0, from programmes with little or no educational content.

Special needs education. Organised instruction for children with special needs should also be included at this level if either the participants are of similar age as other students enrolled in pre-primary education, or if the instructional content is significantly lower than that of the first years of primary education. This concerns in particular education provided in hospitals or in special schools or training centres.

Programmes that combine education and child care. In some countries, institutions providing pre-primary education also provide extended day or evening child-care. In the interest of international comparability, only the educational activity should be reported. A country whose institutions provide these extended day or evening services should attempt to exclude the cost of such services from any reported expenditure statistics relating to ISCED 0. Personnel data should also be pro-rated. This does not preclude, however, the collection of participation, personnel, of finance data on early childhood programmes that fall outside of the boundary of ISCED 0.

When no exact data on students in pre-primary programmes of mixed institutions are available, the number of students should be estimated according to the typical age group for pre-primary education.

When no exact data on personnel in pre-primary programmes of mixed institutions are available, the number of personnel should be estimated based on the distribution of students and preferably also taking into account differing student/staff ratios in the programmes offered by the mixed institution.

When no exact data on personnel in pre-primary programmes that combine education and day-care are available, the number of personnel in the education component and in the day-care component should be estimated and the personnel in the day-care component should be excluded.

Examples

Day care in private homes (Denmark). In Denmark, young children can attend programmes that are offered either in educational institutions or private homes. The “day-care” offered in private homes is paid by the public authorities and controlled by them. As these programmes are not centre-based, however, they do not meet the criteria to be classified at ISCED 0.

Source: 2012 UOE Manual (Volume 1), page 94-95
ISCED-2011

EXTRACT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATION (ISCED) TEXT

10. ISCED LEVEL 0 – EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

A. PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS

100. Programmes at ISCED level 0, or ‘early childhood education’, are typically designed with a holistic approach to support children’s early cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and introduce young children to organized instruction outside of the family context. ISCED level 0 refers to those early childhood programmes that have an intentional education component. These programmes aim to develop socio-emotional skills necessary for participation in school and society and to develop some of the skills needed for academic readiness and to prepare them for entry into primary education.

101. In this level, programmes are not necessarily highly structured but are designed to provide an organized and purposeful set of learning activities in a safe physical environment. They allow children to learn in interaction with other children under the guidance of staff/educators, typically through creative and play-based activities.

102. ISCED level 0 programmes target children below the age of entry into ISCED level 1. There are two categories of ISCED level 0 programmes: early childhood educational development and pre-primary education. The former has educational content designed for younger children (in the age range 0-2 years) whilst the latter is designed for children from age 3 years to the start of primary education.

103. Programmes classified at ISCED level 0 are referred to in many ways across the world, for example early childhood education and development, play school, reception, pre-primary or pre-school or educación inicial. For programmes provided in crèches, day care centres, nurseries or guarderías, it is important to ensure that they meet the ISCED level 0 classification criteria specified below. For international purposes the term ‘early childhood education’ is used to label ISCED level 0.

B. CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA

104. For the definition of early childhood education, the following criteria are relevant:

Main criteria

A. Educational properties of the programme (see Paragraph 105 and 106);
B. Institutional context (see Paragraph 107);
C. Typical target age of children for which the programme is designed (see Paragraphs 102 and 108); and
D. Programme intensity/duration (see Paragraph 110).
Subsidiary criteria

A. Staff qualifications (see Paragraph 111);
B. Existence of a regulatory framework (see Paragraph 112); and
C. Typically not part of compulsory education (see Paragraph 113).

105. The educational properties of early childhood educational development can be described as follows: the learning environment is visually stimulating and language rich and fosters self-expression with an emphasis on language acquisition and the use of language for meaningful communication. There are opportunities for active play so that children can exercise their coordination and motor skills under supervision and in interaction with staff. Programmes providing only childcare (supervision, nutrition and health) are not covered by ISCED.

106. The educational properties of pre-primary education can be described as follows: through interaction with peers and educators, children improve their use of language and their social skills, start to develop logical and reasoning skills, and talk through their thought processes. They are also introduced to alphabetical and mathematical concepts, understanding and use of language, and encouraged to explore their surrounding world and environment. Supervised gross motor activities (i.e., physical exercise through games and other activities) and play-based activities can be used as learning opportunities to promote social interactions with peers and to develop skills, autonomy and school readiness.

107. ISCED level 0 programmes are usually school-based or otherwise institutionalized in a context organised for a group of children (e.g. centre-based, community-based, home-based). ISCED level 0 excludes purely family-based arrangements that may be purposeful but are not organized in a ‘programme’ (e.g. informal learning by children from their parents, other relatives or friends).

108. Within ISCED 0, early childhood educational development programmes are targeted at children aged 0-2 years; and pre-primary education programmes are targeted at children aged 3 to the start of ISCED 1. The upper age limit for the pre-primary education category depends in each case on the theoretical age of entry into ISCED level 1, i.e. primary education (but see Paragraph 117).

109. Integrated early childhood education programmes that span the two sub-categories of ISCED 0 (i.e. educational programmes for children aged 0 to the start of ISCED 1) need special consideration for classification. For programmes divided into years, stages or cycles: those corresponding to the content criteria in Paragraph 105 should be classified as early childhood educational development, and those corresponding to the content criteria in Paragraph 106 should be classified as pre-primary education. Where no subdivision of the programme exists, classification into the two categories should be based on the ages of the participants.

110. ISCED recommends the following minimum intensity and duration to improve cross-national comparability: educational programmes must account for at least the equivalent of 2 hours per day and 100 days a year of educational activities in order to be classified in ISCED.

111. Where appropriate, the requirement of pedagogical qualifications for educators is a good proxy criterion for an educational programme in those education systems in which such a requirement exists. It serves to distinguish early childhood education from child care for which no explicitly pedagogically trained staff is required.

112. Where relevant, the existence of a reference or regulatory framework issued or recognized by relevant national authorities (e.g. a Ministry of Education, other relevant Ministry or affiliated institution)
is a good proxy criterion for an educational programme. This would include guidelines, standards or instructions that describe the learning opportunities provided to young children.

113. In education systems that have compulsory schooling, non-compulsory educational programmes which are designed to take place before they start of compulsory education and which fulfil the criteria above are classified as ISCED level 0. In addition, in some countries the first stage or cycle of compulsory education may also be classified at ISCED level 0 if it fulfils the criteria at this level. Thus, the beginning of compulsory education is not a sufficient criterion to distinguish ISCED level 0 programmes from ISCED level 1 programmes even though this may be the case in some education systems.

C. CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING PROGRAMMES SPANNING ISCED LEVELS

114. Educational programmes spanning ISCED levels 0 and 1 need special consideration for classification. In education systems where a part of early childhood education is included in ‘basic education’, only those grades, stages or cycles corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 104 should be classified as ISCED level 0. Those grades, stages or cycles corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 124 should be classified as ISCED level 1.

115. If use of the classification criteria does not result in a clear boundary between ISCED levels 0 and 1, ISCED recommends: i) for programmes spanning ISCED levels 0 and 1 that are organized in stages, the end of the stage closest to 6 years of age should be used as the transition point between ISCED levels 0 and 1; ii) for programmes spanning ISCED levels 0 and 1 not divided into stages, grades targeting children under the age of 6 should be classified as ISCED level 0, and the remaining grades should be classified as ISCED level 1.

D. COMPLEMENTARY DIMENSIONS

116. One dimension differentiates educational programmes in ISCED level 0:

- Target age group (see Paragraph 102).

E. PROGRAMMES ALSO INCLUDED IN ISCED LEVEL 0

117. ISCED level 0 includes programmes for children with special needs corresponding to the criteria described in Paragraph 104, irrespective of the age of the children.

F. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AT ISCED LEVEL 0

118. Educational programmes in ISCED level 0 are coded 010 for early childhood educational development programmes and 020 for pre-primary education programmes (see Paragraph 102). There are no subcategories differentiated by the third digit.

G. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT ISCED LEVELS 0 AND 1

119. For classifying educational attainment, level 0 (less than primary) is used for individuals who never attended an educational programme, who attended some early childhood education (ISCED 0), or who attended some primary but have not successfully completed ISCED level 1 (with or without having attended ISCED 0). Classification codes for educational attainment related to pre-primary and primary education are provided in Table 4.

Source: International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) text for consideration by the 37th General Conference of UNESCO Page, 21 - 24